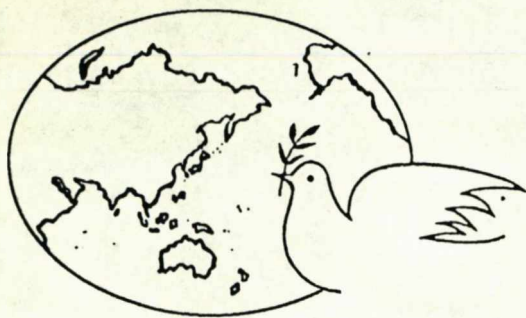




Asia-Pacific Task Force on Human Rights

5, route des Morillons
CH-1218 Grand-Saconnex/Geneva
Switzerland

Geneva, 15 May 1991

Dear Friends and Colleagues in Human Rights,

We write to give you a brief report on the work of the Asia-Pacific Task Force on Human Rights set up in Geneva in 1990 to promote the discussion of and action on human rights issues in the Asia-Pacific region at the United Nations. The attached report focuses on its work during the 47th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights held in Geneva from 28 January to 8 March 1991.

Most, if not all, of you may have received a copy of our concept paper sent last December 1990 mostly to Asia-Pacific countries but also to friends all over the world seeking comments on APTF's concept paper. We are grateful for the many who have given valuable comments which we are now in the process of incorporating into a final document. To those of you who wrote, please consider this letter and report as our initial response.

Please continue to share with us comments and suggestions on the work of the Asia-Pacific Task Force on Human Rights. We would particularly be grateful if you can write acknowledging receipt of this letter and report and expressing wish to be part of the informal network of the Asia-Pacific Task Force on Human Rights.

Very truly yours,

Alvaro O. Senturias, Jr.
Secretary

Victor P. Karunan
Chairman

Attached: As stated (APTF'S Work at 1991 UNCHR's Session)

Report of the Work of the Asia-Pacific Task Force on Human Rights during the 47th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 28 January - 8 March 1991, Geneva, Switzerland

Introduction and Backgrounder

Conscious of the growing incidence of gross and systematic violations of human rights in the Asia-Pacific region, the Asia-Pacific Task Force on Human Rights was established in December 1989 by Geneva-based human rights advocates coming from the region and other advocates working on Asian and Pacific human rights issues. The main objective is "to promote the discussion and action on these issues in the United Nations forums on human rights."

On December 10, 1990, after a year's experience of doing what we planned to do, we circulated a draft concept paper to key human rights organizations in Asia-Pacific and to other parts of the world basically to elicit comments, feedbacks/reactions to the work of the APTF. We are grateful for the responses we received supporting the formation of the task force. We highly value the comments/suggestions coming from different parts of the region which we are now in the process of integrating into a final draft of our concept paper.

Work During the 47th Session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 28 January to 8 March 1991

At the outset, it should be mentioned that the APTF met once a month before the Commission to prepare and discuss priority areas of work during the Commission. Part of the preparation involved securing the approval of the Special NGO Committee on Human Rights and the NGO Liaison Office of the United Nations to grant APTF the use of Room 23 for its weekly briefings on human rights.

It would be useful to report on the work done by the APTF under the three specific objectives of the Task Force.

(1) To facilitate the general sharing and updating of information on Asia-Pacific issues to as many interested non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as possible, and to develop appropriate strategies for work within the United Nations in coordination with these NGOs.

Several times in 1990 we sponsored and co-sponsored fora on various Asia-Pacific issues with speakers coming from various parts of the world and attended by NGOs. During the 1991 47th Session of the Commission we initiated a very successful weekly activity called the "Asia-Pacific Briefings". These briefings were held every Wednesday from 2:00 to 3:30 during the entire duration of

the Commission at Room XXIII opposite the session hall of the Commission. Attendance by advocates, witnesses and NGO representatives ranged from thirty to fifty.

At these briefings, country and other lobby groups would share for a few minutes followed by questions. Moving testimonies were given by witnesses from the region or by NGOs working on Asia-Pacific issues. Towards the end, general questions of strategies were discussed followed by announcements of meetings of the different country and group lobbies.

(2) To work towards a coordinated action on Asia-Pacific issues before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities which meet in Geneva each year.

Prior to the Commission, monthly discussions were held by the Asia-Pacific Task Force on Human Rights towards coordinated action for certain countries like the Philippines, Sri Lanka and East Timor. It was, however, during the session of the Commission when coordinated action was discussed in earnest in the various regular and ad-hoc country working groups that were organized either on our initiative or with our knowledge and participation at least in the initial stage.

In addition to facilitating meetings with NGOs and states, much work centered on the writing of joint declarations or statements on country situations and ensuring that such statements be read at the Commission by an NGO under whatever item is appropriate. Other equally time consuming work was getting as many NGOs as possible to sign a joint declaration. We helped significantly in getting signatures for Sri Lanka, East Timor and the Philippines. After some hard work, we found an NGO to read the joint statement on Sri Lanka and East Timor.

At the last session of the weekly Asia-Pacific Briefings an evaluation was made with the NGOs and witnesses that were still around and everyone pointed to the Briefings as very successful and worthy to be continued in the Sub-Commission and the next Commission session.

There was discussion and approval in principle to work on a coordinated fashion for UN action on the problem of population transfer

(3) To initiate the setting-up of "Country Working Groups" to particularly facilitate information sharing, lobbying work and related activities, especially during the UN sessions on human rights.

It must be mentioned that a regular country working group on the Philippines has been set up in Geneva in 1990. We have worked closely with this group and are positive that more of such a group would be useful.

During the Commission, several ad-hoc country working groups were continually meeting to plan and strategize work in a coordinated fashion. There were groups working on the Philippines, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Burma, China, and Tibet. In some of these we devoted more efforts depending on our capacities and on the needs of the groups. We hope to continue promoting supportive and coordinative efforts in the coming human rights sessions of the United Nations.

APTF/Geneva - 15 May 1991